



RIVER ROAD COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

NEWS FROM THE RIVER ROAD COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION • SUMMER 2006

Notes from the Chair

By Rob Handy



Homes in the River Road neighborhood reflect a variety of architectural styles.

Annual Meeting

More than 200 of us gathered at Emerald Park in March for the River Road Community Organization (RRCO) annual meeting. Ken Guzowski, Eugene City Planner, presented slides and distributed a comprehensive booklet documenting Historic River Road. The meeting made for some remarkable conversations as former neighbors and current residents were immersed in the history of the River Road neighborhood. Ken delighted us with images of our agrarian heritage, the automobile's impact on the development of our neighborhood, and the wonderful homes and variety of architectural styles noted in this area. Our heritage is also defined by the people here and the history project uncovered those stories, too. It was delightful to

hear the memories that were sparked in many community elders.

Readers can find more information at <http://www.eugeneplanning.org>. Click on "historic preservation," then click on "River Road History" to see the "Eugene's Historic River Road" document.

The Road Ahead

Recently, some of you participated in the Community Conversations, hosted through the River Road/Santa Clara (RR/SC) Transition Project. Sifting through the data of your comments, priorities, and values, I sense an emerging trend—an urgent need for responsible land use planning and governance.

Current city code that overlays fourteen housing units per acre is not appropriate to most of the neighborhoods in the River Road area. Current city standards don't mesh with the landscape heritage of these historic neighborhoods. Revised and refreshed infill standards are needed, as are standards that address our unique storm water, street, and density concerns that are not currently addressed in City of Eugene code.

The River Road neighborhood is a longstanding, independent community built with the vision and toil of longtime residents and infused

by the energy of newer families. The City of Eugene is growing and what was once an independent River Road neighborhood is now encompassed within the urban growth boundary. Many admit annexation is inevitable, even stalwart opponents. Some of our neighbors are already city residents. What does it mean if wholesale annexation occurs?

We will need serious planning that results in codified language that protects what is unique and special about our community; storm water and street standards that preserve our country-style drainage, trees, and terrific soil; placement of higher-density housing along major arterials, with targeted lower-density of an appropriate scale in the deeper neighborhoods; and equitable support for the River Road Park District. Increased taxes may be a real issue to residents, especially those on fixed incomes.

Every effort must be made by both citizens and elected officials to work to preserve and enhance our quality of life and our unique neighborhoods. With these reassurances—these protections—written into city code, residents may start to feel that their voices are heard and, more importantly, that our quality of life, available services, and the appearance of our neighborhoods could be enhanced by annexation. Without this protection our future is uncertain.

Please Join Us

Want to keep abreast of news in the River Road area that affects county and city residents alike? Receive the monthly River Road e-newsletter and learn about issues relating to land use applications and decisions, transportation, and schools. Find out what topics are scheduled for the monthly River Road Community Organization meetings. To subscribe send your e-mail address to:

Rob Handy
Chair, RRCO
handyrob@hotmail.com
689-6372

The River Road Community Organization meets the **THIRD** Monday of every month at 7:00 p.m., River Road Annex, 1055 River Road. The public is always welcome. See you there!

Policy statement: This is the official newsletter of the River Road Community Organization. Newsletters are published and distributed courtesy of the City of Eugene. Newsletters are produced by neighborhood volunteers and are free to residents and businesses of the neighborhood. Space is available for letters to the editor with editorial comment from neighbors. All signed letters will be published as space permits. Editorials express the author's views, not the position of the Neighborhood Association, the City's elected officials, or City staff.



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Find more information about Eugene neighborhoods on the web at www.eugene-or.gov. Click on "Neighborhoods" under "City Quick Links."

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Envision Our Future Neighborhood: Your Voice and Ideas are Needed

By Becky Riley

River Road: Gateway and Destination, or Anywhere, USA?

Imagine a summer Saturday near the south end of River Road—the area where the river curves to within a stone's throw of the road. The road has been transformed into an attractive pedestrian boulevard. Buildings and trees line both sides of the street, creating a pleasant mixed commercial and residential district like the “Main Street” of many small towns. Retail shops and offices occupy the street level of the buildings. A number of historic houses have been restored and incorporated into the mix as shops, restaurants, and offices.

This part of the road is connected, visually and physically, to the river and greenway corridor via pedestrian paths and green spaces at Razor Park and other locations. Bus riders enjoy the panoramic views from the road to the greenbelt and the cottonwoods along the river corridor. The area is also connected to residential neighborhoods to the west. There are attractive landscaped pedestrian crossings at multiple points along River Road.

People are out walking. Some are heading toward colorful market stands to buy fresh produce newly arrived from farms out River Road. Others are taking care of basic shopping and commercial service needs at the stores and shops. Children are walking to the small branch library, or to the neighborhood grocery store to buy milk.

Adults are sitting at a café along the road, enjoying a cup of coffee. Some are sitting on benches in the public plaza, reading the newspaper. A few stop to read a plaque describing the area's natural and human history—the connections to the river and the Applegate Trail. Others are cutting across the greenway, away from the bustling commercial area to enjoy a stroll through the natural areas along the river.

Students and seniors live in modest studios and apartments above the commercial storefronts. Others enjoy more upscale apartments with views to the river. In the evening, River Road residents of all ages congregate near certain public landmarks in this area to enjoy the public atmosphere, and to be near the river. People from other parts of the city also come by bus or bike to shop or enjoy the ambience of this attractive and distinctive neighborhood.

Does all this sound far-fetched—just a utopian fantasy? Certainly it is very unlike the reality of this area—or any other part of our neighborhood—today.

But could this area be reborn as an attractive, pedestrian-friendly and functional neighborhood commercial and residential center—a place with special character and forming an inviting gateway to the larger River Road neighborhood?

Certainly these kinds of neighborhoods exist—they used to arise spontaneously as the downtowns and neighborhoods of U.S. cities and small towns a century ago. Urban planners across the U.S. are trying to direct growth and development back into these older patterns—now called mixed-use centers (MUCs)—recognizing their value at countering sprawl and increasing livability in urban areas by reducing the need for driving.

Because of the interest of the River Road Community Organization (RRCO) and neighborhood residents, the City of Eugene is putting some resources toward planning for an MUC in the River Road neighborhood. The City secured a state grant for a first phase of planning and public outreach. A consultant has been hired, and a public involvement process will soon be underway. The area of the proposed MUC was selected because of its location along a major transit route, its existing mix of commercial and residential uses, and its relatively large amounts of underdeveloped land with the potential for higher density redevelopment.

The potential is there, but there are also many challenges. The first step will be to see if a diverse group of property owners and residents within and nearby the selected area can articulate a common set of interests and a conceptual vision for what such a center might include. Then, there are various approaches to making that vision a reality. Direct public investment in facilities and infrastructure—public buildings, parks, or street improvements—is key up front. The City can also encourage private development of specific types of mixed commercial and residential uses, through tools such as regulation, zoning, incentives, loans, grants, or tax abatements. But redevelopment of this area will also require significant initiative and collaboration from private investors and developers.

There is reason for hope. Mixed-use neighborhoods did once arise “naturally”—before zoning regulations evolved to discourage them. Their benefits are recognized—both to residents and to business and property owners who profit when their properties increase in value and their businesses are located in attractive and desirable neighborhoods. There is also reason to hope that private investors will see the value of contributing to the creation of public institutions or infrastructure (and to increase the success and profitability of their associated private enterprises). In a country of our wealth, this is not impossible—remember the lasting legacy left to communities across America from Andrew Carnegie's donation of millions to build high-quality public libraries. There are many important questions to consider:

- Can River Road really be tamed into a more attractive pedestrian boulevard?
- Can we reconnect our neighborhood and road to the river and greenway without destroying the natural values that make this area special and important in the first place?
- Can redevelopment of this area be done in a way that protects and enhances the value of existing and historic residences?

A new mixed-use center will not arise overnight, but gradually, over many years. A certain core of investment and redevelopment likely does need to occur to jump-start the process. However, a slow and incremental redevelopment—involving multiple local investors with a stake in the outcome—is likely to be most successful in the long term at ensuring that the area is redeveloped in an authentic way appropriate to the scale and character of our neighborhood and reflective of public values.

Keep an eye out for notices about meetings and other opportunities for public input into the plan for the Razor Mixed-Use Center. Bring your good ideas and join a dialog with your neighbors to see if we can find a common vision for revitalizing this area of our neighborhood for the benefit of residents and property owners alike.

Contact Ken Guzowski at Ken.J.Guzowski@ci.eugene.or.us to get on the “interested parties” list.



Osprey

Birding on the River

By Kate Kelly

It's 6:00 a.m. on a misty morning along the Willamette River and as the rosy, golden dawn grows brighter, the cacophony of bird song becomes more vibrant.

It's the time of year for the annual songbird migration and many species stop here and serenade us before they move on. Their songs blend with the more familiar calls of the Canada geese and other water fowl and birds that are here on a year round basis.

The swallows, violet-green, cliff, barn, and tree, are some of the more familiar birds that migrate through and stop to raise their young. They come from as far away as South America and travel north to Alaska. Quite a flight for a five-inch bird! Even more amazing is that they often eat “on the run,” catching insects while in flight.

The dramatically colored wood ducks that are here all year actually nest in trees, unlike the more common mallards who nest on the ground. Their preferred nesting height is twenty to sixty feet, but nests can be as high as one hundred twenty feet, from which the ducklings jump to join their mother either in the water or on the ground. They are so soft, they just bounce and move on.

Other birds you may well catch sight of are yellow-rumped warblers, black-headed grosbeaks, red-winged blackbirds, and killdeer as well as the more common robins, sparrows, and atarlings. Don't forget to look along the river banks for the elegant great blue heron and check overhead for soaring hawks and osprey. If you are fortunate, you may see of a pair of cinnamon teal ducks, the early morning sun catching their brilliant plumage—just so.



Great Blue Heron

Neighborhood Calendar



Summer Concerts in the Park

Emerald Park, 1400 Lake Drive

Satin Love Orchestra

Sunday, July 9, 2006
4:00–7:00 p.m.

The Valley Boys

Monday, September 4, 2006 (Labor Day)
4:00–7:00 p.m.

REI Service Project: Willamette River Enhancement Initiative

July 15, 2006
9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

It's time to focus on the newly designated "water trail,"—our own Willamette River. REI is partnering with Eugene and Springfield, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and numerous nonprofit agencies to clean up the urban stretch of the river from Island Park to the Beltline overpass.

You can help restore our river by donating four hours of your time to help us clear the river of garbage and potentially hazardous debris on Saturday, July 15, from 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. Several teams will be placed along the banks to pick up trash. Folks will also be needed to help clear boats of garbage as they ferry back and forth across various stretches of the river. Due to the intensive nature of this project, participants must be fifteen and over. High school students may receive community service credit for participating with one of our teams.

Advance registration is required. You must sign up in person at REI Eugene, 306 Lawrence Street, corner of Lincoln and Lawrence next to the Washington Street Bridge. No registrations will be taken on site the day of the event. Participation is free.

For more information, please e-mail the outreach coordinator, Michelle Emmons, at memmons@rei.com or call (541) 465-1800 ext. 252.

Summer Reading Adventures

The River Road/Santa Clara Volunteer Library is hosting a free program for children in kindergarten through third grade. This year's theme is Paws, Claws, Scales, and Tales.

We will have Summer Reading Adventures every Wednesday from 10:00–11:30 a.m., June 21 through August 16 (except Wednesday, July 5). Children and their parents or caregivers can join us for story time, crafts, and snacks. Please call to enroll or simply drop-in. Come and join the fun this summer at the River Road Park Annex at 1055 River Road. For more information contact Crystal Batchelor at 688-3303.

If you are interested in volunteering for the Summer Reading Adventures call Patrice Philpott at 520-0726.

This program is made possible by a grant from the Lane Library League.

Transition: The Next Steps

By Mara Wile

Over the past several years River Road residents and City of Eugene staff have been working on future planning options for River Road and Santa Clara. To date this work has been guided by the City of Eugene staff and consultants. Beginning this summer, the River Road Community Organization (RRCO) and the Santa Clara Community Organization will be taking the reins of this planning project.

Previously, residents have stated that land use and governance are areas of greatest concern for our community. Development of parks and community are also important to us. The RRCO plans to explore these topics and invite citizen feedback in the following ways:

- **Newsletters**—We are thrilled to report that some of the remaining funds of the River Road/Santa Clara sewer bond fund will be used to print and mail newsletters to noncity residents. City funds will continue to support newsletter mailings to city residents.
- **Community Outreach and Education**—It is essential that residents are well informed on neighborhood issues. The RRCO will plan and host larger meetings and small group discussions to learn more about these issues and focus on the ways each one of us can make a difference
- **Land Use Issues**—The City of Eugene guides the land use and development applications in the River Road neighborhood using land use code designed for all areas in the city. These codes are not always appropriate for the footprint and character of our established neighborhoods. In order to tailor new development to fit longstanding development patterns and existing neighborhood character, members of the RRCO will be developing land use language with the intention of recommending amendments to the city code.
- **Storm water**—Currently the City of Eugene and Lane County are developing a storm water basin plan for the River Road and Santa Clara neighborhoods. Many River Road streets were not designed with curbs, gutters, and sidewalks. Storm water flow and management is an environmental issue and a land use issue. Extensive additional curbs and gutters could pose a financial burden for residents. The RRCO has already voiced some recommendations regarding this. (See p. 4.)
- **Infill and Opportunity Siting**—the River Road area is experiencing infill at a rapid rate and consequently what is most unique and endearing about our community is being put at risk. Other neighborhoods in our area are experiencing this same issue due to pressures set by the urban growth boundary and current City of Eugene land use code. In order to reduce urban/suburban sprawl and loss of precious farm lands, most agree that some of this development and higher density is inevitable. However, shaping and managing how it occurs is essential.
- **The RRCO will join with Santa Clara Community Organization** when possible in developing this process of neighborhood outreach and negotiation with the City of Eugene. Our neighborhoods face many of the same issues.

Many River Road residents have been clear in their opinions about annexation, new high-density infill housing developments, the speed limit on River Road, and lack of representation with the City of Eugene. We now have an opportunity to say what we support, what we envision for our future. What do we really want in terms of development and governance for the River Road neighborhood? How do we join together to work toward that end?

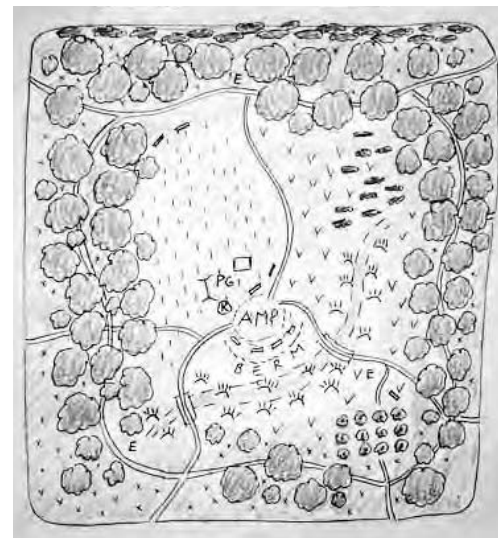
Watch for announcements about upcoming educational meetings and join us in the next steps of this important process.

Opinions expressed are those of the author.

Creating Rosetta Park: Building Neighborhood Connections

By Jan Spencer

Planning for the newest neighborhood park in the River Road area is underway. A process to create a master plan for Rosetta Park has begun. Rosetta Park is a 1.1 acre square in the southern River Road area bounded on the south by Benjamin Street, on the east by Evergreen Street, and on the west by Manzana Street.



The Master Plan process will gather input from the public to help form the park's design and amenities. City planner Philip Richardson has mentioned that public involvement is essential for a successful park design. Further, with ongoing volunteers assisting in maintenance of the park, its design can become more ambitious. The site currently is a large, open grassy area.

The River Road Community Organization (RRCO) has already endorsed a pesticide- and herbicide-free park. Other popular ideas include low-impact native plants, a grassy play area for children, picnic tables, large trees, and perhaps an amphitheater. A meandering swale would provide for more diverse habitat.

This stage of the Rosetta Park development provides the chance for neighbors to collaborate on the design and to make plans for assistance in the

ongoing maintenance of the park. This is a wonderful opportunity for neighbors to meet and build community while creating this small neighborhood park.

An informal group, "Friends of Rosetta Park," has formed and invites any interested neighbors to join in. If you would like to be part of these discussions call Jan Spencer at 686-6761 or e-mail him at spencerj@efn.org. Contact City Planner Philip Richardson at 682-4906 or e-mail him at philip.s.richardson@ci.eugene.or.us for more information.

Concept drawing and design suggestions are those of the author.

Preserve Natural Drainage, Protect the Willamette River

By Becky Riley

Many of us are fond of complaining about how much it rains, yet of course, rain is what makes the Willamette Valley the fertile and attractive place it is. Our orchards, farms and gardens rely on rain. It keeps our trees green and healthy and replenishes the groundwater that supplies our irrigation wells (and drinking water in rural communities). Rain and groundwater feed the Willamette River, which sustains our neighborhood and community in many ways.

Certainly, there can be too much rain at times. Longtime neighborhood residents will know that heavy rains have caused the Willamette to overflow its banks and inundate residential areas of River Road multiple times—most recently in 1946 and 1964. Dams and reservoirs constructed upstream in the 1950s and 60s now help reduce—but have not eliminated—the flood risk.

However, there are more everyday aspects of rain to consider here in the River Road area, too. Unlike other parts of the city, much of our neighborhood is still served by the “country-style” drainage that remains from a more rural era. Instead of underground storm sewer pipes, water infiltrates naturally into soils, roadside ditches or depressions, or constructed drywells. Large trees also intercept and filter thousands of gallons of stormwater.



Rainwater collects in this roadside depression during heavy rains, but percolates into soil within minutes. PHOTO: BECKY RILEY

Flat Creek is the major natural surface water drainage in the River Road neighborhood. It originates near the intersection of the Northwest Expressway and Park Avenue, and flows northwest toward Diana's Pond and Beltline.

Generally this “country-style” drainage system works very well at preventing local flooding—so well, that it is almost invisible to us, and we may come to take it for granted.

However, development and human activities are having an impact. Temporary local flooding can occur where soil is compacted or paved. Some residents have unwittingly contributed to the problem by paving roadside drainage ditches for parking.

Property owners have also filled drainage ways, without realizing the impact this can have on nearby properties and the integrity of the entire drainage system.

Storm sewer segments have been installed in newer residential areas of River Road, and also along certain streets. When it rains, stormwater from parts of the River Road neighborhood now flows directly into the Willamette via these pipes. Unfortunately, this unfiltered road runoff can also carry gasoline, oil, and sediment into the river. In residential areas, runoff from roofs and driveways carries additional pollutants—detergent, weed-killers, and more.

The River Road neighborhood is developing rapidly. As more of our soils are covered with homes and the paved or compacted surfaces that surround them, where will the water go? Will our natural drainage system be able to absorb or contain the runoff? Will enough water infiltrate soil to replenish our groundwater? Will the City install more storm sewers? Can the river stay clean and healthy with all the additional runoff?



New development is paving and covering more soil. PHOTO: BECKY RILEY

The City of Eugene and Lane County are evaluating our area's drainage system right now, and will soon recommend development standards, capital improvement projects or acquisition corridors needed to protect and upgrade the system. There will be opportunity

for public comment on the River Road-Santa Clara Stormwater Basin Master Plan prior to its completion this fall.

The City is also currently taking public comment on proposed development setbacks to protect certain water-quality-impaired waterways, including Flat Creek.

In addition, the City has a new ordinance that requires developers to construct “stormwater facilities”—such as grassy swales, eco-roofs, or infiltration planters—to capture and filter runoff from new developments to remove pollutants. Developers can also get “credits” for saving or planting trees. They can opt to use drywells, soakage trenches, permeable pavement, or other methods to allow stormwater to infiltrate on a site instead of flowing into a storm sewer system. The new standards will also be used on City public works projects.



Roadside swale for capturing and filtering stormwater

Unfortunately, some development is exempted from requirements for stormwater pollution control “facilities”. Also, the ordinance applies citywide, but it does not recognize—and does little to

protect—the unique natural drainage of our River Road area.

Increasingly, natural drainage is recognized for its superior ability to absorb and cleanse water. Protecting natural drainage is also more economical than installation of costly public stormwater piping and treatment facilities.

The River Road neighborhood's “country” drainage system will work only if all its parts are operational. Residents, developers, and our public agencies need to do their part to maintain drainage ways, preserve street trees, protect soil, and limit paving.



Large trees play a valuable role in River Road's natural drainage system. PHOTO: BECKY RILEY

RRCO board members have asked the City to adopt “low-impact development” standards that would require developers to minimize impervious surface and protect soils and existing natural drainage ways when they build new homes in our area. We are also asking the City to develop “green” street standards. In addition to drainage

benefits, “low-impact” developments and green streets can contribute to a more attractive and livable neighborhood.



Permeable driveway design. PHOTO: CURTIS HINMAN

River Road neighborhood residents are encouraged to join the River Road Community Organization in asking for strong provisions to protect our natural drainage.

To voice your concerns, please contact:

Mayor Kitty Piercy and the City Council
mayorandcc@ci.eugene.or.us

Therese Walch, Eugene Public Works
541-682-8647
therese.walch@ci.eugene.or.us

and let them know that it is important that we

- Protect Flat Creek from development and fill
- Adopt “low-impact development” standards to protect soils and trees
- Adopt street standards that protect existing street trees and “country-style” drainage

For More Information

River Road-Santa Clara Stormwater Basin Master Plan:
<http://www.co.lane.or.us/RoadMaint/RRSCBasinPlan.htm>

Proposed water quality protected waterways:
www.eugene-or.gov/PW (Public Works Department home page)

